

**Remarks of Caleb King '20
J.D. Class Speaker
Columbia Law School Graduation
Wednesday, May 20, 2020**

Class of 2020: It is hard to put into words how honored I am to share in this special moment with all of you. Now I know this isn't how we envisioned the conclusion of our legal education, but the magnitude of this accomplishment should not be understated. For many of us, it has been a long journey simply to arrive at this very point. Each and every one of us have had to face and overcome our own unique challenges. And we have.

But this accomplishment wasn't achieved alone. So, I would like to thank our professors, administrators, and staff for all of their support and efforts—both seen and unseen—during the past three years. I would also like to thank our loved ones, whose support we have constantly relied upon over the years. The completion of this chapter is a testament not only to our own strength but to the strength of that community, that support system as well.

For many of us, including myself, thinking about the future ahead might bring some feelings of anxiousness and uncertainty. Our class will be entering into a world that will depend on us to be leaders.

Professionally—let me be the first to say that I have no doubt that this class is prepared for that challenge. Our time at Columbia has given us the tools to be tremendous advocates, which I have no doubt all of you will be.

But as we move into this new reality, I want to emphasize just one thing, and that is it is time for us to lead with a spirit full of empathy. Over the years, I've seen so much frustration and so much pain within so many of our communities because of issues that have become even more critical during this pandemic. I have to be honest, even before these challenging times, I've struggled and I've grappled with why some of these inequities continue to persist in our society.

During these past three years, I've tried to make sense out of a world where women of color are incarcerated for months at Rikers because they can't afford bail. I remember my conversation with one of these women. She was a mother and during her time at Rikers for the most part, she starved herself because she was carrying the guilt of knowing that there was no one back home that was making sure her own children were being properly fed and properly taken care of. I have tried to make sense out of a world where children who should be enjoying the simplicities of life, instead have to overcome the mental toll that comes with knowing that there are individuals out there who

vilify their very existence merely because of their race, their socioeconomic status, or the geographic location that they were born in.

These are real, true stories. These are memories that I will never forget. But I like to think that our society can be much better and it starts with each and every one of us.

You see, as attorneys, we all know we have a responsibility to uphold a standard of excellence. But I believe that we all have an even greater call to be civic leaders in our community. And that, that is done by living a life full of compassion and empathy for others. Compassion and empathy for those who might have different experiences, who might have different stories from ourselves.

We are all part of something greater, a community, a family that goes beyond just this class. I believe it is as empathetic and purpose-driven community members that we are all most valuable to the very fabric of our society. I have no doubt that in the coming years this world will look very different. In fact, it already is. It's changing in significant ways on a daily basis. But with this continued change, I believe there will be an opportunity for us to lead by example. We cannot afford to wait for others to set the example for us. Throughout these past three years, I've seen the strength of this class. But now, in this moment, I see our strength more than ever. When we all lead with a spirit full of empathy and compassion for others, I have no doubt that we have the ability to positively shape the future and impact lives.

Class of 2020, I am so proud to have learned alongside all of you, and I am grateful to be entering into the legal profession with this class. Frankly, our journeys have already begun, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for all of us.

So again, congratulations, and I can't wait to celebrate with all of you again.